

This is a series of field-notes on the birds of Natal and Zululand, some of which have already appeared in the columns of this Journal (see *Ibis*, 1897, pp. 400, 495; 1898, p. 216). They contain many interesting particulars on the habits of the feathered creatures of this district, in which the writers have had a long and varied experience.

The figure of *Stactolema woodwardi* (*Ibis*, 1897, pl. x.) is repeated in this volume.

XII.—*Letters, Extracts, Notices, &c.*

WE have received the following letters, addressed "to the Editors of 'The Ibis'" :—

SIRS,—I have just received my copy of the last number of 'The Ibis,' and I ask you to rectify the notice on the habitat of *Gisella jheringi* Sharpe. The example sent by me to the British Museum was not from S. Paulo, but was obtained by Mr. Chr. Euler in the colony of S. Lourenço, Rio Grande do Sul. The second example, from S. Paulo, is in our Museum, stuffed. The description of it agrees with that of Dr. Sharpe, but I am not informed by the British Museum Catalogue as to the tail of *G. harrisi*. Our example has the last or subterminal of the three caudal bars buff, and the white spots of the upper tail-coverts confluent into bars. Its measurements are 139 mm. of the wing, 77 mm. of the tail.

Yours &c.,

H. VON JUERING.

S. Paulo,
August 12th, 1899.

SIRS,—I am sorry to say that the native "shooting-men" have at last found out that there is a silver-mine in the "plume trade," with the result that one of the greatest ornaments of our landscapes is apparently doomed to destruction.

It was a pretty sight in the spring to see a stretch of paddy-fields with the brilliant green of the young rice

setting off the silvery white plumage of a number of Egrets as they stalked about in search of food. That, however, is now a thing of the past. Last year the natives got an inkling that money was to be made, and shot a good number of the birds. The prices realized astonished them, and this spring every man who could shoot at all was on the look-out. A terrible slaughter began on the arrival of the wretched Egrets, and continued, until from Suey Kao, 70 miles up river, to Hing hua, some 60 miles S. of Foochow, the country may be said to have been swept clean.

I will give you one or two cases only, of all the sickening details told of the massacre.

A "heronry" of *Herodias garzetta*, which used in summer to be a beautiful sight from the river, with the white plumage of the birds showing out in strong contrast to the dark green foliage of the two huge trees in which their nests were placed, has been entirely depopulated.

Further down river was a "heronry" of *H. garzetta* with a sprinkling of *H. eulophotes* in a village. The local mandarin put up notices warning people against molesting the birds. The "shooting-men," however, found out that the birds flew in a certain line down a narrow valley to their feeding-grounds. Selecting an afternoon with a stiff breeze that not only deadened the reports of the guns, but made the birds fly low, a party of five or six stationed themselves at the end of the valley, and shot down the whole colony. One of these men told me that the villagers were very angry because of the bad smell that arose from the *decaying bodies of the nestlings*.

A native caught lurking about with a gun near a "heronry" in the suburbs of the city was severely bamboozed and had his gun confiscated by the mandarin. I asked the man who told me whether that would protect the birds. He said "No, we wait for them outside;" and added, with a chuckle, "they must come out to feed sometimes."

Of course here we cannot do anything in the matter, and it is doubtful whether the new Game Preservation Society started in Shanghai to prevent the export of Pheasants' skins,

and which I understand intends to include *all* feathers in its field of work, will be able to do much good.

It is to the *civilized West* that one must look, and I fear look in vain, for help!

That it is a subject in which I know you take an interest must be my excuse for inflicting this lengthy document on you.

Yours &c.,

C. B. RICKETT.

Foochow,
August 25th, 1899.

SIRS,—It may interest your readers to know that a female Yellow-billed American Cuckoo (*Coccyzus americanus*) was found lying dead at Craig-y-don, on the shores of the Menai Straits, on the 10th inst. It was in good condition, and I have had it placed in my collection.

I presume that it was brought over by the heavy westerly gales prevailing at the time. Apparently this is only the sixth instance of this bird having been found in this country.

Yours &c.,

GEO. DICKINSON.

23 Abereromby Square, Liverpool,
November 16th, 1899.

The Pairing and Incubation of the Ostrich.—In reference to the vexed question of the mode of pairing and incubation of the Ostrich (see *Ibis*, 1899, p. 481), our attention has been called to the excellent article on this subject published by Mr. S. C. Cronwright Schreiner in the 'Zoologist' of 1897 (p. 97). Mr. Schreiner, who has had nine years' experience of Ostrich-farming in Cape Colony, shows most conclusively that the Ostrich is practically monogamous, one male and one female pairing and making the nest, both birds taking their share in the duties of incubation—"the hen sitting generally from 8 or 9 A.M. to about 4 P.M., and the cock from 4 P.M. to about 8 or 9 A.M."—and both parents taking charge of the young birds when hatched. The curious

fact about the breeding-habits of the Ostrich is that there are "unattached hens" which, having no nests of their own, lay their eggs in the nests of other hens. But Mr. Schreiner's opinion is that this is altogether an irregular proceeding, and that in such cases the eggs are rarely hatched successfully.

Deaths of four Members of the B.O.U.—With very great regret we have to record the death of our friend and fellow-worker Dr. A. C. STARK, Member of the B.O.U., who was killed by a shell at Ladysmith on November 18th. Dr. Stark, who was in England all the past summer, went out to South Africa in September last, and, after staying a few days at Capetown, proceeded to Durban to continue his ornithological researches in Natal. When the British troops advanced to Ladysmith Dr. Stark volunteered to join the medical staff. About half-past seven on the evening of November 18th Dr. Stark was struck by a shell, when standing at the door of the Royal Hotel at Ladysmith, and killed almost instantaneously. Before he left England, Dr. Stark had passed through the press the sheets of the first volume of his work on the Birds which he had undertaken to write for Mr. W. L. Selater's 'Fauna of South Africa.' We fear that it will be very difficult to find anyone to continue the work for which our much-lamented friend was specially competent from his long personal studies of the birds of South Africa in their native wilds.

With much regret we also have to record the loss of three other members of the British Ornithologists' Union since the issue of our last number—HEDWORTH HYLTON, second Lord HYLTON, who died on the 30th of October last; Mr. THOMAS JAMES MONK, who died on the 22nd of December last; and Mr. EDGAR LEOPOLD LAYARD, C.M.G., who died on the first day of the present year. Of Mr. Monk, as well as of our old and valued friend and coadjutor Layard, we intend to give notices in our next issue.
